

Homecoming by Kyarorain

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Summary:

At the end of the long journey, Ivan returns home.

Homecoming

At the top of the steps, Ivan stood for a moment to take in the sight of the palace building standing before him. His entire body relaxed and he lowered his head, expelling a deep sigh through curved lips. While it had been sad to say goodbye to his travelling companions, Ivan was still overcome by a whirling mix of joy and relief to find himself home at long last. Besides, it wasn't like the goodbye was forever, he was going to be seeing them again, and right now, he just wanted to revel in the feeling of returning home after a long journey. Ivan strode forward, approaching the palace doors and catching the attention of the guards stationed outside.

"Ivan! It's certainly been a while since we last saw you."

"Oh, your friends aren't with you? Could it be that your journey is over?"

Ivan nodded. "That is correct."

"Oh, what wonderful news! Lord Hammet and Lady Layana will be very happy to hear it. They really have been missing you. Please, go ahead." The guard opened the door and stepped aside, allowing Ivan entrance to the palace.

Ivan quickly made his way through the corridor, excitement stirring inside of him. He really was looking forward to finally seeing them again and being able to deliver the good news. Another guard was standing in position by the door to Hammet's throne room.

"Excuse me. Are Lord Hammet and Lady Layana in?"

"Oh, if it isn't Ivan. Welcome back. Yes, they are in the throne room, please go ahead and enter."

"Thank you." Ivan stepped through the door. At the other end of the room, he saw Hammet and Layana sitting next to each other, deep in conversation. They looked up at the sound of the door opening and jumped to their feet once they realised who their visitor was.

"Ivan, it's you." Layana put a hand to her mouth.

"Welcome back, Ivan." Hammet regarded his servant with a broad smile. "I don't see your friends. Does that mean your quest has ended? I hope it was a success."

Ivan thought back to the day he, along with Isaac, Gareth and Mia, had visited the palace and learned of the prophecy Hammet had received, dictating that he was to someday go on a quest. That day had seemed like forever ago. It was funny to think about how the original goal of their quest had changed so much. They had ended up doing the exact opposite of what they originally intended to do but their actions had saved the world so it certainly could be called a success, couldn't it? "Yes. It all went well and now the journey is over."

"Thank goodness." Layana spoke in a tremulous voice, raising clasped fists to her chest. Her head dropped slightly. "I'm happy to hear that."

"Well, that's quite a relief." Hammet exhaled. "We have been looking forward to hearing news from you." His brow furrowed. "So, your journey must have taken you all over the world, I imagine?"

Ivan nodded. "Oh yes, we travelled all over Weyard and saw all sorts of places. It was quite the experience. I even got to

travel on a flying ship. Imagine that."

"So you did." Hammet crossed his arms. "No doubt your travels took you to your hometown."

"Of course. I was even able to meet my older sister." It had come as such a surprise to finally find his home and learn that he had relatives. When he was younger, Ivan had once asked Hammet, only to be told he had none but he understood now that was merely for the sake of keeping the prophecy a secret and he bore no ill will toward Hammet for his secrecy.

"Yes. Hama." Hammet nodded. "She actually did visit me. I had her take care of the gift that I had hoped to give to you. You did receive it after all then?"

"That's right." Ivan recalled Hama telling them about her visit. "I'm sorry that I couldn't have dropped by again before setting off out to sea."

"Nonsense, your quest was far more important. You didn't have time to be constantly coming back." Layana rubbed her arms. "Anyway, you got the gift so it all worked out. It must have been nice to finally see the place where you were born."

"Actually, when Hama stopped by, I asked about your mother." Hammet's expression turned somber. "Your mother was trying her best not to cry as she handed you to me, but I could see how hard she was fighting to hold back her tears. It was clear she didn't want to give you up and I was worried, but everyone insisted that it was of the utmost importance and I couldn't refuse. I felt terrible to learn that she had passed away."

"That poor woman." Layana shook her head. "She must have been in so much pain. But you mustn't blame yourself, Hammet."

"She's right." Ivan came closer, looking up at his master. "You did what you had to do. I had an important role to play in saving the world and I did it. Anyway, I have an older sister now so it's not all bad. I still have living relatives."

"Thank you, Ivan." Hammet rested a hand on Ivan's shoulder. "I am very proud of you." He drew in a deep breath, then released it. "Well then, now that you are aware of your hometown and even met your sister, I suppose you will be going to live with her now?"

"Huh?" Ivan recoiled with an openmouthed stare. "What? Uh, I mean, it does make sense but I honestly hadn't even thought about going to live in Contigo. Yes, I would like to see my sister from time to time of course, but Kalay is my home. This is the place where I grew up."

"Wait, you mean you want to stay here?" asked Layana. "In Kalay?"

"Yes, of course." Ivan looked back and forth between them, feeling utterly bewildered by the expressions of surprise on their faces. A sharp pang cut through his chest and his throat clogged up.. "You mean you want me to go and live there? You don't want me here anymore?"

"No, that's not what she's saying. She's just surprised, that's all." Hammet glanced at his wife. "The thing is, we believed that once you had gone on the journey and found your home and family, you might want to stay there."

"Yes. That's it." Layana's eyes glittered. "We always prepared ourselves for the eventuality that you might leave us and

live there, far away from us. That's why... why we didn't want to get too close to you..." Her hand covered her mouth.

"Lady Layana? Whatever is the matter?" Ivan looked at her with concern.

Layana shook her head and turned around, walking to the back of the room where she stood with her head bowed. Even from where Ivan stood, he could see her shoulders trembling.

"What's wrong? Why is she crying?" Ivan turned his gaze on his master.

"Well." Hammet started to pace. "We weren't sure if you would choose to remain here. Of course, it makes sense that you consider this your home, you grew up here after all. From the moment I took you in, Layana and I decided that we wouldn't get too attached to you." He stopped and raised his head, looking at the ceiling. "How foolish of me."

"I don't understand." Ivan shook his head. "I'm not sure what you mean by getting too close to me. I mean, you've been a good master to me all these years and Lady Layana has been so good to me too. You've treated me like one of your own."

"No." Hammet lowered his gaze to the floor, shaking his head. "I made you my servant. Yes, I treated you very well, but by being your master and treating you as my servant, I was putting distance between us. It didn't have to be that way. We just thought that someday we would have to say goodbye and it would be too painful if we were too close to you."

Ivan stared at him, his mouth hanging open. "I had no idea," he said in a soft voice. "You two are the closest things I've

ever had to family. You gave me a home. I've always been happy here."

"You know." Layana expelled a heavy breath and marched back over. Twin trails of moisture glistened on her reddened cheeks. "When I held you in my arms as a baby, I thought you were such a sweet little thing. We hadn't founded Kalay yet, we didn't have this big castle and all these servants, so it was up to me to take care of you. I held you and fed you, I saw you take your first steps. It was a joy watching you grow up. I knew that we weren't allowed to get too close to you..."

With a hitch, Layana's voice broke off and she swallowed, struggling to compose herself. "But, deep down, I always wished that it didn't have to be that way. I really wanted to think of you as my own. I'm sure Hammet felt the same way too."

Hammet was still standing with his head bowed. After a long moment of silence, he spoke. "Yes, Layana speaks the truth." Meeting Ivan's eyes, he continued speaking. "I have always cared about you very much, Ivan, but I never allowed myself to think of you as more than my servant. Now I honestly feel regret over that decision. I'm sorry, Ivan."

"You have nothing to be sorry about!" Ivan exclaimed. "You took me in and you raised me, and I have never wanted for anything more. I never felt like I was missing out. Yes, I might have wondered about my origins, but I never once wished I wasn't here. This is the place where I grew up and I am happy to call Kalay my home. So please allow me to continue living here."

"What are you talking about? You don't need to ask our permission. This is your home after all." Hammet took a deep

breath and approached Ivan, clapping his hands onto his shoulders. "In fact, you are no longer my servant."

Ivan's jaw dropped. "I'm not?"

"No. Actually..." Hammet paused, taking a look at Layana. She wiped her eyes, meeting his gaze with a shaky smile. "From now on, Layana and I would like to think of you as our son, to officially adopt you into our family."

Layana put her hands over her mouth, her gaze shifting to Ivan.

"Ivan, would you become my son? I know it probably can't make up for all the years I treated you as my servant, but I would be very happy. To tell the truth, you have always been like a son to me and even though I hardly dared admit it, part of me did hope you might choose to remain here with us." Hammet watched Ivan expectantly, waiting for his response.

Ivan stared up at the man who had been his master, completely lost for words. To think Hammet and Layana had cared about him more deeply than they let on all these years, and now they would actually accept him as a part of the family, it was enough to suddenly bring him to tears. Taking a deep breath, he reached up to wipe his eyes then spoke in a steady voice. "That really would be a great honour. It would please me very much to be accepted as your son."

"Oh, Ivan!" Layana rushed forward and threw her arms around him.

Ivan froze, momentarily stunned by the action. It had been a very long time since Layana had last hugged him, when he

was but a small child. He slowly put his arms around her waist and relaxed, basking in her warmth.

Hammet moved in, putting his arms around the two. "I'm so very happy to have you home, Ivan. From now on, you are our son."

"Yes," Layana sobbed out. "I'm so glad. If only... if only we had just been your parents from the start. Thank you, Ivan, thank you for accepting us."

The three of them remained in a tight embrace for a while before pulling away. Ivan reached up to dash the tears from his cheeks. He looked from Hammet to Layana with a broad smile. "I'm home, Mother, Father."